

International Student-Athletes Find Balance with Athletics and Academics

I left my whole family at age 17 because I knew that I wanted to play volleyball in college,” said Larissa Schneid '23 — a student-athlete from São Paulo, Brazil, who plays on the Mercy College women's volleyball team.”

Schneid and Brady Kearnan '23 — a student-athlete from Courtice, Ontario, Canada, who plays on the Mercy College men's lacrosse team and has been drafted to play professional lacrosse — both left home because of a desire to focus on both athletics and academics in college. And they found the perfect balance of both at Mercy.

If she had stayed in Brazil, Schneid knew that she would have had to choose between being an athlete and going to college: “Playing volleyball was part of my identity. And I couldn't see myself without it, at least not at 17. I wanted to be able to get a degree while also playing volleyball at a high level.” An agent helped her connect with schools in the



United States, and she spent two years at Iowa Western Community College — during which time her team won the National Junior College Athletic Association championship — before transferring to Mercy. She continued to play well at Mercy and was named First Team All-East Coast Conference in 2021.



Mercy made transferring as smooth as it could have been: “Mercy helps a lot, and there's a lot of support for international students. We have good professors, tutoring, an athletic department filled with amazing people. I'm never fully on my own. The amount of help available at Mercy is turning me into a go-getter. Before, I was waiting for things to happen, and Mercy is teaching me to go get what I need because the resources are there if you want them.”

Being part of a team helped with the transition as well: “At least I knew 14 other girls and we had volleyball in common, so that made it easier to make friends.”

When she graduates with a degree in biomedical sciences next year, Schneid hopes to work on the business side of the health sciences, perhaps in strategy or project management at a pharmaceutical company.

Kearnan's plans for next year recently took an exciting turn. In September, he was drafted by the Georgia Swarm professional lacrosse team as the 20th pick in the first round of the 2022 National Lacrosse League Entry Draft. He has been a strong player since joining Mercy's lacrosse team three years ago and has earned several recognitions including being named a United States Intercollegiate Lacrosse Association All-American each of the last two years and a First Team All-American in 2022. He helped lead the Mavericks to the third straight East Coast Conference (ECC) Championship, third straight NCAA Tournament appearance and first-ever appearance in the Division II National Championship game.

“It's a surreal feeling,” said Kearnan of being drafted to play professional lacrosse. “I've been playing lacrosse since I was two years old and watching professional lacrosse for as long as I can remember. I'm super happy and excited for this opportunity, and I just want to make my family and friends proud.”

Similar to Schneid, he decided to leave Canada for college primarily because the level of lacrosse played in college is much higher in the United States: "I love home, but I also like branching out. Coming to the U.S. has been the best decision I've made in my life."



After spending a year at Newberry College in South Carolina, Kearnan transferred to Mercy. Ryan MacSpadyen '19, M.B.A. '21 — who was incidentally the first player in program history to be drafted to the Georgia Swarm in 2019 — was the one who first suggested Mercy to Kearnan. "Hearing both Ryan and Mercy's coach speak about the program was what made me want to come," Kearnan said. "The team had won the ECC Championship the year before, and I knew that is a stepping stone to an NCAA Championship. I thought I could be an asset to them."

And the rest is history: "I fell in love with Mercy, and I've met my best friends here — you know, the guys who will

be in my wedding one day. The team is so resilient. We always know when we've got work to do, and we just do it. We hold ourselves to very high standards, both on the field and off."

A communications major, Kearnan praised Mercy's supports for student-athletes, including study hall where student-athletes have a dedicated space and time for studying: "It really helps me make sure I get everything done."

Some of his best memories at Mercy are the hours of telling stories and joking around with the coach and teammates on long bus rides to games: "All those little moments, all of them mean something in the end."

"The best part of being here is learning how different everyone is," he said. "Without coming to a different place, I never would have experienced that. Being away from home has changed my life."

"We hold ourselves to very high standards, both on the field and off."



Brady Kearnan '23 and the Mercy Mavericks compete against Tampa.

Photo by Brian Foley